

The Overlander
By Will Ogilvie.

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THE OVERLANDER

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

WHAUP O' THE REDE : A BALLAD OF THE
BORDER RAIDERS.

THE LAND WE LOVE—BORDER SONGS AND
OTHER VERSES.

RAINBOWS AND WITCHES.

FAIR GIRLS AND GRAY HORSES, WITH
OTHER VERSES.

HEARTS OF GOLD AND OTHER VERSES.

MY LIFE IN THE OPEN.

THE OVERLANDER

AND OTHER VERSES

BY

WILL OGILVIE



Karl Lohmeyer

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PART I.
AUSTRALIAN VERSES



I.

THE OVERLANDER

I KNEW them on the road : red, roan, and white,
Cock-horned and spear-horned, spotted, streaked
and starred;

I knew their shapes moon-misted in the night
As I rode round them keeping lonely guard.
I knew them all, the laggards and the leaders,
The wild, the wandering, and the listless feeders.

And when I, weary, by the camp-fire slept,
Booted and spurred, beneath Heaven's rafter
beams,

With slow and measured step their hundreds kept
Moving and moving past me in my dreams.
I knew them all : streaked, spotted, roan and red;
A thousand steers, range-run and Queensland bred.

I loved the wide gold glitter of the plains
Spread out before us like a silent sea,
The lazy lapping of the loose-held reins,
The sense of motion and of mystery
As the great beasts slid slowly through the grass,
One passing one, then letting it re-pass.

I loved the misty sunrise, when the herd
Drew from the camp, close-ranked, with clash of
horn,
When 'neath their hoofs the scented dust was stirred
Still heavy with the dew-fall of the morn.
I loved the jingle of the swaying load
As the lean pack-horse lobbed into the road.

So, day by day, as men have done for years,
Across the plain we brought the cattle down;
And half my heart was with the moving steers
And half lay yonder in a Border town;
For, waiting there, my guerdon and my prize,
Was home, and love, and little Laughing Eyes.

I was a western bushman born and bred,
And so I loved the cattle, as men do
Whose life is to the dusty sandhills wed,
Whose world is bounded by a fence of blue;
Yet one flower nearer to my heart I wore—
The baby laughter of a child of four.

The lories screamed above us as we rode;
The emus ran before us, swift with fear.
A great resistless tide of life we flowed,
The largest mob out of the north that year;
The muffled moving of the many feet
Like sighing waves upon the silence beat.

Two hundred leagues of stock-route burnt and brown
In twelve-mile stages day by dazzling day
Had worn the cleft hoofs of our cattle down
But had not stolen their wild hearts away;
And in wide eyes 'neath shaggy frontlets set
The fire of the free ranges smouldered yet.

A swagman stumbling down the dusty track,
His blanket bundle on his shoulder borne,
Would send the startled flankers rushing back
To stop and stare at him with tossing horn.
A camel train across the sandhill stringing
Would lift all heads and set the leaders ringing.

At night a blown bough tapping on the wire
Would bring them scared and restless to their
feet;
A burnt log crashing inward on the fire
Would lash their rebel blood to fever heat;
And on the stormier nights when winds blew hard
'Twas double watch—and sometimes three on guard.

As we drew near the Border tank and creek
For water failed us, and stage after stage
The poor brutes plodded on for near a week
In thirst that we were powerless to assuage.
Blind, dropping froth, they stumbled in their going
And filled the sandhills with their piteous lowing.

On all the earth there is no sadder sound
Than moan of cattle when their thirst is great;
It quivers in the trees, and sky and ground
With all its hopelessness reverberate :
This heart-cry of the dumb brutes in the wild
That sears you like the sobbing of a child.

We hung our stock whips on our saddle-dees;
We crooned to the great beasts to soothe their
pain;
We sang to them to set them at their ease;
But still their weird, low moaning filled the plain,
As, blind, they passed us on their ceaseless quest,
Pleading for water till the suns went west.

We reached the Border. On the night before,
Forgetting for an hour those moaning cries,
I found again the little flower I wore
Close to my heart, and dreamed of Laughing
Eyes.
Ere the next night should come with star flag
streaming
My arms should hold her; so I thought in dreaming.

The cattle passed the netting fence at noon.
Day blazed upon the glittering township roofs.
The sun peered like a pale and misty moon
Through the red dust wrack of the drumming
hoofs.

They smelt the water at the dams already;
We rode in front to hold the leaders steady.

Voices they heard not; whips they would not heed.

They swept upon us like a tide-wave's flow.

The dust rose up and wrapped us, man and steed;

And through the dust came thrilling—"Let them
go!"—

Swift towards the gleam that marked the river bed,
Mad, blind, unbound, thundered the thousand head.

The red earth shook. The horns flashed by like
flame.

The moaning rose and gathered to a roar.

All passed; even the laggard and the lame;

The plain lay empty as a desolate shore.

A known roof glimmered under dust-brown skies!

Home!—Home at last, and love—and Laughing
Eyes!

Behind the mob the dust clouds thinned and cleared,

And as the sun broke through with sudden light

A tiny heap upon the sand appeared,

A heap of white; a—huddled—heap—of—white!

Ah! God!—I live again that anguished hour!

*The tattered, trampled thing!—My flower! my
flower!*

* * * * *

All day I see them moving, moving by;

 All night I hear them moaning in my dreams.

Always that little heap—ah! let it lie!—

 Always the dust that whirls, the roof that gleams!

Always the sunlight as the dust clouds part,

And shadow, shadow, shadow on my heart!

The city reels about me. Carts and cars

 Make thunder down the streetways east and west,

But out amid the silence and the stars

 I ride around my cattle as they rest.

The camp fire's banners on the dark extend;

The horse bells jangle in the river bend.

The grey dawns wake them; out of sleep they start,

 And draw amid the dim light down the plain;

Their every hoof is heavy on my heart,

 Their every horn stabs deep with an old pain;

And yet I love my cattle—God knows why!—

I sing to them, I sing as they go by.

I know them all so well; red, roan, and white,

 Cock-horned and curly, spotted, streaked, and
 starred;

I know their shapes moon-marked upon the night

 As I ride round them keeping lonely guard.

I love them all: streaked, spotted, roan and red;

My thousand steers, range-run and Queensland bred.

II.

THE BUSH FIRE

THE Sun has signed his nightly armistice,
Drawn a dark cloud across his crimson breast,
And gone to war with other lands than this,
Lowering his splendid banners from the west.
Down the world's edge the summer lightnings play,
Their broadswords flashing o'er departed day.

Night comes, long sought for; but in coming brings
No breeze to stir the leafage of the vine.
A bullfrog mutters. A mosquito sings.
White-hot the stars on cloudless purple shine.
In stifling silence like the hush of death,
Gripped by the throat, Earth labours to draw breath.

Booted and spurred, brown arms to the shoulder
bare,
A keen-eyed watcher turns his anxious gaze
To where the dim gold of a distant glare
Is faintly mingled with the star-lit haze.

The pale glow reddens, mounting high and higher—
Through hollowed hands rings out, reverberant,
“ Fire ! ”

Swiftly the homestead wakes; oaths sound, spurs
clank;

A stockman at the hut flings down his cards :
“ Fire !—get the horses ! ” “ Where ? ” “ The
Ten-mile tank !

Here, up you go ! I'll open up the yards ! ”
He swings the horse-boy to his bare-backed seat;
The sandhill echoes to the night mare's feet.

The dark is filled with clatter of flung rails,
And shout and question. Then a stern command :
“ Fill up the cask ! Look out those green-hide
flails !

Call up the cook and get some grub in hand !
Now look alive; run out that waggonette
And fling those bags aboard—and see they're wet ! ”

The muffled hoofbeats on the sandhill sound;
The crack of whip comes snapping from the dark;
With snort and whinny when the mob wheels round
Where all the sheep-dogs tug their chains and
bark.

The black boy clinging to old Possum's mane
Rides hard to stop them breaking back again.

He brings them up full speed before the whip;
The yard-posts rattle as they crush and climb.
"Confound you!" yells the super, "you black rip,
Go slow, and give the blasted horses time!"
A moment later they are in the yard
And Jake leads off the night mare blowing hard.

The boundary riders through the slip-rails swarm
To catch their horses in the dark and dust;
Each has a snaffle bridle on his arm
With throat-lash dangling, ready to adjust.
The sweating brutes ring round and dodge and
wheel,
With here a snort and there a vicious squeal.

"Now, then, go steady!" shouts the overseer,
"One at a time, or we'll be here all night.
Here's Ruby, Bob! Here, Jack, stop Buccaneer;
Block him! Mind that mare's heels. Now,
hold him tight!—
Come on, there, with those blasted winkers, Jake,
And put some life in you, for the devil's sake!"

Outside, the saddles are flung on in haste;
Men grope for girths and buckle them by guess.
"Look sharp, now, boys! ye've got no time to
waste.
The sooner there, our work will be the less!"

He swings a long leg over old Bluebell—
“Now, stick to me; sit down, and ride like H—I!”

There is a sudden trampling of swift hoofs,
A rustle as the buddah bushes part,
An answering echo in the station roofs,
Then silence till you'd hear your beating heart.
The cook stands listening, scratches his grey head,
And disappears indoors to set his bread.

Through the horse paddock, past the cattle yard,
Cleaving the starlight of the wool-shed plain,
Stumbling in flood-made hoof-tracks dried and hard,
Dave leads the way and gives old Bluebell rein.
Behind him, touching stirrups clashed in tune,
His men ride loosely, cursing for a moon.

White-hot, white-hot the busy South stars burn.
The night leans low upon them as they ride,
With moist, hot, kissing mouth that none may spurn
And stifling arms that none may thrust aside.
Beneath the reins a foam, cream-yellow, breaks;
And from the bits white foam comes back in flakes.

The leader steadies at the Ten-mile gate
And pauses, looking with an anxious eye
To where against a bank of purple slate
The dull red glow spreads wide upon the sky;

A sudden smoke rolls up. He mutters, turning
To those behind him—"That's the lignum burning!"

The gate swings open and the troop rides through
Across a ridge set close with dense young pine;
And now each horseman has enough to do
To dodge the saplings on his leader's line,
Who, with bent head upon the brown mare's mane,
Threads the thick scrub full gallop with loose rein.

The plumed boughs whip their shoulders as they
stoop,
The supple stems strike here and there a knee,
A low top twines them in a bending loop,
A shirt sleeve flutters as they graze a tree;
But through it all that demon leader rides
As though the shadows were his goblin guides.

At last, emerging from the pine-scrub patch,
They reach the plain, some swiftly, some more
slow;
And spurs and stirrup bars and bit-rings catch
Amid the dark a sudden golden glow.
There comes a roar as of a rock-faced sea :
The red gods trumpeting their majesty.

Westward a long low line creeps down the grass;
But in the forefront where the lignums grow
Stand the massed squadrons that no man may pass,
The steep red ranks no man may overthrow.
The stars grow faint before them. Like a pack
Of baffled wolves the shadows are flung back.

No king e'er bore such banners; red on gold
And gold on red they whip the summer sky;
Pale pennons streaming, crimson flags unrolled
And lined and lettered where the smoke-wisps
fly;
Banks of gold banners blazing forth to lead
The red-cloaked rider and the dark-maned steed.

No wind is stirring in the sandhill trees
But in the open where the red knights ride
Their cloaks are twisted by an errant breeze
The moving squadrons have themselves supplied.
As when across a still air huge wings going
Disturb the calm and set some strange wind blowing.

With measured step and ordered swing and sweep,
As scythemen through an English meadow pass,
The red-cloaked swordsmen, riding fifty deep,
Beat down the wild flowers and the barley grass;
While now and then one spurs beyond the rest
With hate all quivering on his golden crest.

The brown mare, Bluebell, lifting up her head,
Shakes her wet flanks and whinnies to the fire,
As though somewhere within the ranks of red
A smoke-maned stallion answered her desire.
Loud trumpets call; banner on banner reels.
Blind in the flames a half-burnt rabbit squeals.

“ Well, here’s your ballroom ! ” says the overseer;
“ So take your partners and begin the dance !
She’s burning on a five-mile frontage here,
And if the wind gets up we’ve got no chance ! ”
The men slip from their saddles one by one,
Break boughs to beat with, and the fight’s begun.

And now the night looks down on desperate war,
The clash of nature with the pride of man.
The fire leaps forward with a louder roar,
Her ten-foot champions riding in the van.
Before her red steeds rolls a wave of heat
Blown by their nostrils, scattered by their feet.

The eager bushmen, with their brown arms bare,
And swarthy foreheads dropping grimy sweat,
With eyes that smart beneath the scorching glare,
And blackened hands to their fierce labour set,
Take the red sword blades on their make-shift shields
As heroes might in deadlier battle fields.

Shoulder to shoulder in the smoke they strive,
Now rushing in to strike, now leaping back
As serried foemen through their thin ranks drive
And break and scatter them in flank attack.
Yet, still unbeaten and still undismayed,
They form once more and meet them blade to blade.

And now the fire gains ground, now suffers rout
Before the resolute onset, till a breeze
Breaks from the mulga ranges further out
And stirs the silver of the myall trees,
Whips the red stallions into prouder life
And bids them plunge more wildly in the strife.

The noblest courage now can nought avail
Against the trumpets and the trampling heat;
When fire and wind join forces to assail
The bravest fighters must accept defeat.
Along the line the leader's order runs :
" Back to the sandhill; for we're beat, my sons ! "

With hot sweat smarting in their reddened eyes,
With black, burnt arms full of a weary ache,
The men leap back and loose their horses' ties,
And leave the long grass for the fire to take.
Then each the canvas at his saddle seeks,
And drinks, and drinks, and drinks—and no one
speaks.

The tall grass ceases where the sand begins.

Here ringbarked box-trees stand, a ghostly guard;
Here are green bushes where the spider spins;

Here grass is short, and sheep paths trodden hard.
Full well they know—that smoke-grimed, weary
band—

Here, would they make it, they must make their
stand.

The ramping squadrons, freed from all restraint,

And lashed to fury by a master new,
Roar through the lignum while their hot hoofs paint
The ground behind them in a darker hue.

On, on and on, the rolling phalanx comes
With screaming bugles and loud-threatening drums.

A gold sword flashes and a red hoof smites,
A cloak of crimson on the wind is whirled,
The foremost box-tree is a blaze of lights,
Another banner on the dusk unfurled.
In the tall hollow trunk the red tongues roar,
Voicing their triumph and the lust of war.

From stem to stem the hate-spun hoof-sparks fly,
Grim heralds of the hot and hastening swords;
Below them the red stallions thunder by
Bearing the red-gold splendour of their lords.
The great trees groan, and rend, and fall in twain,
And crash their burning length along the plain.

Then, as though wearied by their own success,
The red resistless riders check their steeds,
The swords are lowered and the shouts grow less,
The banners trail among the smouldering weeds.
The furious forces of the fire grow slack
For want of foemen worthy of attack.

“Lay in, and let her have it now, my lads!”
The bushmen wipe the sweat drops from their
brows,
And, as the gold wood splinters to the adze,
The gold flame scatters to their flogging boughs.
Foot after foot the ground is forced and won,
The flags are trampled, and the fight is done.

The sky grows clear where late the smoke-manes
wreathed,
No more the red cloaks whirl, the loud hoofs
drum;
All down the line the golden swords are sheathed,
All down the line the tasselled bugles dumb.
Where the thin herbage on the sandhill lies
The last knight staggers, drops his blade, and dies.

The dark comes down on warm and drowsy wings;
The dark and the deep silence. Here and there
A lone scout of the last battalion swings
High on a burning stem a broadsword bare;
And now and then a spark against the sky
Shows red, as though some loose horse galloped by.

III.

A LEAF FROM MACQUARIE

A GUMLEAF from Warren, all withered and brown,
Fluttered out from a letter to-day,
And my heart has gone back where Macquarie
winds down
By dusty red stock-route and sleepy grey town
Between banks where the river-oaks sway.

The far-travelled sheep lie at rest in the bend,
And the camp fire gleams red to the sky,
The shadows creep round us, and day's at an end
And the gum trees lean down to us, friend unto
friend,
As the night-winds go murmuring by.

Not a horse-bell of ours but the gum trees have
heard
As their watch by our camp fire they keep;

Not a tired overlander, stretched, booted and
spurred,
In a dream of mobs rushing has muttered and stirred
But the gums sang him back to his sleep.

Aye! and those of us holding lone watch in the
night—

Have we ever looked upward in vain
To the magic brown branches that trellis the blue,
Where the stars of our comfort look hopefully
through,
Giving strength for the battle again.

A leaf from Macquarie! My heart's on the road
With a mob yarded out of the years!
No higher-priced gift could a hand have bestowed
Than this withered brown leaf with its mystical load
Of old laughter, old labour, and tears!

IV.

MY AUSTRALIAN SPURS

OLD and worn my Bushland spurs
Hang above my desk to-day.
Memory, on that broom of hers,
Witchlike bears my heart away,
Over seas that restless roll,
'Neath forgotten stars that shine,
To a dim and distant goal
In a land that once was mine.

There I wake where Dawn has trod,
Bind again those friends of steel,
As the happy morning god
Binds the sunlight on his heel,
Taking back on golden plains
Youth set free of Time's reproofs,
Laughter loosening the reins,
Joy that speeds the lifting hoofs.

Gathering from the morning mist
Come the comrades loved of old,
Brown of cheek and red of wrist,
And with hearts of royal gold,
Iron-thighed and lithe and lean,
Toilers of the rope and brand,
Men who know what friendships mean
And the worth of hand on hand.

Through the drowsy Bush we ride
(Lonely, worn Australian spurs!)—
Half the world can ne'er divide
These our exiled hearts from hers!
From her gum-trees' chequered shade,
From her rivers brown and low,
From the call our hearts obeyed
Long, and long, and long ago!

Better far that yonder wall
Keep my old Australian spurs,
If it be the Bushland call
Now no more our troop bestirs;
But if gay they gather yet
Where the scrub-line meets the blue,
When your broom is Southward set,
Witch, take back my heart with you!

V.

THE RIDING CAMEL

I WAS Junda's riding camel. I went in front of the train.

I was hung with shells of the Orient, from saddle and cinch and rein.

I was sour as a snake to handle, and rough as a rock to ride,

But I could keep up with the west wind, and my pace was Junda's pride.

I was Junda's riding camel. When first we left our land

Camels were rare on the Queensland tracks as ropes made out of the sand;

But slowly we conquered a kingdom till down through the dust and heat

Not a road from the Gulf to the Border but carried the print of our feet.

And I was the riding camel. I carried him—Junda
Khan—

The dark-skinned Afghan devil made in the mould
of a man!

I gave no service to others, yellow, or white, or
brown,

But Junda Khan was my master; I knelt when he
“Hooshed!” me down.

When the gloom on his forehead gathered, when he
fingered the blade at his belt,

The men who handled the nose-strings knelt low as
the camels knelt;

For each of them—beast and driver—from Koot to
the camel-foal,

Knew that the man who led them owned them body
and soul.

Northward I carried my master. The creek by the
road was dry;

The sun like a burning wagon-wheel rolled down in
the western sky;

The dust was white on the saltbush, the ruts were
deep in the road,

And the camel behind me grunted at every lurch
of his load.

A dust-whirl rose in the bushes and circled into the
sky,
The shells on my harness rattled as its burning
breath went by.
And out of the endless distance clear-cut on the
world's edge lone
Like a silver sail on the ocean the roof of a home-
stead shone.

The white man stood at my shoulder, sunburnt,
lissome and straight,
In the deep of his eyes was anger to match with
the Afghan's hate.
I know no word of the quarrel. The "Hoosh-ta!"
came and I knelt;
And Junda sprang from my saddle, and the knife
leapt out of his belt.

There was a cry in the sunset, an echo that rang at
the ford;
Then silence fell on the roadway till a scared bull-
camel roared.
My master turned and mounted; I felt the sting of
his goad,
And we swept away through the saltbush; and the
rest stood still on the road.

The night came up from the river, darksome and
deep and drear.

Swift were my feet on the sandhill but swifter fol-
lowed his fear.

When the stars were dim in the daylight and the
moon on the mulga low

A hundred miles of desert lay between the blade
and the blow.

We were far from the fetter of fences and far from
the dwellings of men,

Yet for less than an hour he rested, then mounted
and rode again.

I was sore and weary and thirsty when out of the
blaze of noon

We camped in the shade of a wilga clump and drank
at a long lagoon.

Ah! Never was life-blood taken of white, or
yellow, or brown

But the keen-eyed men in the helmets have ridden
the taker down!

Never a trail on the sandhill of camel, or horse, or
shoe

Crossed by a hundred others but the trackers have
tracked it through!

Sore of the saddle and weary Junda, the killer, slept;
But I, I watched from the bushes while the armed
avenger crept.

Sharp came the call in the English tongue, and my
master sprang from sleep,
Hand to the hilt of his Khyber knife, crouched for
his one swift leap.

Brave are these outpost English, but simple as
children be;

The pistol-barrel that held his life hung loose at the
trooper's knee.

There was a flash in the sunlight, the gleam of a
long blue blade,

A cry in the noontide stillness, a corpse on the
sandhill laid.

I was his riding camel; but deep in my heart there
stirred

Something of lust and anger I could not name in a
word.

When he came to me swift and sudden, the blood-
red knife in his belt,

I could not kneel at his bidding as I and my sires
had knelt.

Wrath at his long-time goading, fear of his cruel
hand,
Made me a raging devil that heard no man's com-
mand.
And when he struck at my nostrils, mad with his
human fear,
I clenched my teeth in his shoulder, and clung till
the blood ran clear.

I knelt with my weight and crushed him. He
died, and at Allah's Gate
The soul of him sobs and trembles where the grim
Black Camels wait.
Could I do else, my brothers, I who remembered
then
The moan of the laden pack-beasts and the mutter
of Junda's men?

VI.

THE OUTLAW

OUR realm was the fenceless ranges. We fed in
the bluegrass swamps.

The green of the branching wilga was the roof of
our noonday camps.

We drank at the pools in the lignum, where the
mist and moonlight meet,

Stealing like wraiths through the darkness with the
dew on our shoeless feet.

I was the chief and warden. I watched while the
shy mares fed.

I herded the bitless yearlings—those proud, wild
sons I bred.

When a dry twig snapped in the forest, when a
snake slid out of the grass,

I called my mob together till I saw the danger pass.

For matchless speed and beauty and pride of blood
and bone
The bushmen of the Border had marked us as their
own.
All day they planned their stockyards and set their
blue-gum bars,
All night they wrought our capture as they dreamed
beneath the stars.

They tracked us to our playgrounds. They hid to
watch us feed.
They matched their weighted walers against our
naked speed;
And when we broke and beat them, out-wiled them,
and out-ran,
I was the proud grey stallion that thundered in the
van !

For long our speed defied them. We met and beat
their best :
The Border's swiftest horses and the picked men of
the West;
But Drought rode down the ranges and drove us
worn and weak
From out the sheltering mulga to the flats beside
the creek.

Then with their corn-fed horses they chased us,
frail and afraid,
And forced us foamed and fretting to the yards that
they had made;
Within their ten-foot fences and behind their blue-
gum bars
They held us—kings of freedom whose fence had
been the stars.

They broke my mares to harness. They saddled
my splendid sons
To round the cattle on drafting-camps on drought-
bound western runs.
These they bent to their bidding; but I was aware
and awake;
They broke my sons to service, but me they could
not break!

I threw their famous riders one by one as they came :
The lean, brown reckless bushmen that sought my
heart to tame.
I would not bear their burden, I who had never borne
More than the dust of the noonday, more than the
wind of the morn!

And then he came—my master ! Lissome and iron-
thighed,
Lord of the earth's wild horses, riding as Centaurs
ride.
Boldly I battled beneath him; I matched my
strength with his own.
I had thrown a hundred riders. He was not born
to be thrown !

He scored my ribs with greenhide. He spurred my
flanks till they bled.
He checked my mouth with the bar-bit till the foam
came back to him red.
I fought like a maddened wild-cat at the ceaseless
sting of his steel,
I turned like a tortured tiger-snake and bit at his
rowelled heel.

I gave him no easy triumph. Stubborn, I would not
yield
Till my eyes were hot and clouded and my hide was
wet and wealed;
But at last my sinews slackened, my proud, wild
spirit was spent,
And I bent to the will of my rider as I never before
had bent.

Then did he show no mercy, but for every stroke I
 had made
Struck me again, and fiercely, with his splendid
 strength for blade.
He spurred me out to the ranges then, dripping with
 blood and foam;
And weary and blind and conquered, he flogged me
 bitterly home.

Day after day he rode me. I ceased from the use-
 less fight;
I could not face his courage and I could not match
 his might.
I had marshalled in vain my cunning, I had pitted
 my strength and failed,
And under the eye of the master at each new dawn
 I quailed.

But the fire at my heart kept burning. At last, as
 he stooped for a girth,
I leapt with a scream of fury and struck my foe to
 the earth.
I trod and trampled him under, I tore his breast with
 my teeth,
My towering weight above him and his quivering
 flesh beneath !

Then I broke to the open ranges; there was none
could stop me or stay.
No creek in flood could foil me, no fence could
bar my way.
I tore his trappings from me on the boughs of the
belar
And, naked as I left them, I went back to wind
and star!

The scrubs were gray as ever and the lignum swamps
as green.
I found the shady wilgas where our noonday camps
had been.
But the Bush was still and lonely; I had neither
breed nor bride,
When I whinnied down the ranges it was echo that
replied.

Then came my fear upon me; a fear that fills my
breast;
A racking, ruthless terror that robs me of my rest;
A shadow-shape that meets me where the wilga-
shadows stir,
The phantom of a horseman that rides with whip
and spur.

My flanks are cleansed of blood-marks, my bit-torn
mouth is healed,

But again I meet my master and again he makes me
yield.

Beneath the moons of midnight and through the
morning haze

He flogs me, wet and trembling, down the old re-
membered ways.

I could not throw him, living, in my fierceness and
my faith;

And to-day I find no courage that will rid me of
his wraith.

With lean ribs lashed by terror, with flanks that fear
makes red

I carry through the ranges the Unrelenting Dead.

I feed not in the daytime. At night I take no rest.
The sweat is on my shoulder and the foam is on my
breast.

I bear no bit nor bridle, but 'neath the open sky
The wraith of him that rode me shall ride me till
I die!

VII.

THE PACK HORSE

MY hoofs were hid by the dew-wet clover,
The tops of the blue-grass touched my girth,
From the river-timber a wind came over,
Sweet with the scents of the warm, wet earth—
The day that our team to the Westward started,
And the plains like an ocean of hope unrolled
To the gaze of the youthful, happy-hearted
Riders bent on a road uncharted
Into the land of gold.

The way was glad with their careless laughter,
The Bush was gay with our camp-bell's call;
The blue of the sky was our nearest rafter,
The edge of the world was our closest wall.
I tugged, as I went, at the tall swamp-grasses;
The hobbles clinked and the tin-ware rang.
Youth's are the eyes with the rose-hued glasses;
Youth's is the faith that never passes;
Blithely the riders sang.

Sang of the girls they had left behind them;
Sang of the gold that their toil would win;
Of the arms of the Bush flung wide to wind them;
Of the sky and the stars that would gather them in.
Tossing their bits, the hacks went swinging;
And proud I stepped 'neath the picks and pans,
Glad of the help my strength was bringing,
Glad, as I heard my masters singing,
Every word was a man's.

The way was long to the western ridges;
Summer was swifter than horses' feet;
Behind us, we knew, were our broken bridges
Where the pools had dried in the dust and heat.
Sick for the sun like a blood-fed spider
Over the web of the world to pass,
Slower we stepped with the pack and the rider,
And every night our bells went wider,
Searching in vain for grass.

We came at last to the sand-swept spaces;
A mountain of quartz stood rugged and white,
The men were famished, with drawn, grey faces;
Our ribs were lean and our flanks were light;
But there—all pink at the day's beginning—
Was the spot that the rose-hued glass had shown;
There, at their feet for its worthless winning,
Heart of sorrow and soul of sinning,
Gold, they might take and own.

They left their picks to the wind and weather,
Yet I carried more than my back could bear,
And I was their hope, for my mates together
Lay lean and dead on the drift out there.
Bravely I staggered beneath my loading,
But drought had stolen my strength away,
I could not travel for all their goading;
At night I knew with a grim foreboding
Death would come with the day.

The dawn looked down on a pack-horse dying,
And a load that lay in the grey-white dust,
And a haggard horseman, "He cannot," crying,
And another cursing, "He must. He must."
One struck with a rope. The sky went reeling;
A tiny cloud in the East turned red.
When sense to my stricken brain came stealing,
I knew that one on the sand was kneeling,
And that one lay dead.

I did not die. When I saw him going,
I rose to my feet, and, faint and weak,
Followed; and so, untold, unknowing,
We came at last to the one full creek;
And so through the windswept desert spaces
Back to the pasture-lands of pine,
Back to the world of girths and traces,
With a secret hid from the searching faces—
His secret and mine.

VIII.

THE WHITE IBIS

WHEN the fierce Barwon from the Border brings
His massed battalions to the drought's defeat,
Above his pathway, with white folded wings,
I dream in the noon's heat.

I hear the Southward gallopers go by,
Bearing the message of the brown flood's threat;
I hear the whistling teal above me fly
With glistening wings and wet.

I see the ruins of a hundred farms
With plunder of grey banks beneath me swept;
I know the dawn's fear and the night's alarms,
I know the vain watch kept.

Sometimes there passes with the drifting things,
Lifting and falling, turned to the blank sky,
A drowned face whiter than my snow white wings,
Then—a lone mourner—I,

Who know the deep heart of the Barwon best,
And all the hunger of his hate unfed,
Pluck, in my pity, from my snowy breast
One white plume for the dead.

IX.

THE WATCHER OF THE FIRES

AROUND me lies the ghostly Bush,
And from its deep and silent heart
The grinning shadows peer and push,
And dance like devils, and depart.

Behind me crowd the mocking years
To dress the line 'twixt dark and light;
Before me stands, a fence of fears,
The fronting barrier of the night.

But in a circle set with gold,
As life is set with dear desires,
A realm of hope is mine to hold,
A kingdom of far-glittering fires.

Each stem is girt with jewelled swords;
Each dead limb holds a golden spear :
The burning heaps are battle-lords
To stand between me and my fear.

And every point the years have thrust,
And every blade the dark has drawn,
Shall fall to ashes and to dust
Before my red fires faint at dawn.

X

CICADAS

WHEN the Bush is still as death,
And the night wind whispers under her breath,
When the white stars beckon without a word
And not one leaf of the box is stirred—
Sudden, as though at the baton-fall

Of a hidden leader, the oak-trees break
Into sibilant music, one and all;

And every pine has a harp to wake,
And every gidyea a tune to call.

Then the bridle-path that was dumb and drear
Rings with an elfin music clear,
And the shimmering starlight wraps us round
With a cloak of passion, a robe of sound.

We pierce the shadows with watchful eyes;

But, however the moon shine bold and bright,
However the weird notes fall and rise,

There is never a sweet-throat singer in sight
'Twixt the sombre earth and the silver skies.

'Tis a song of love and a song of pride,
And it swells in a rolling splendid tide,
Till the night with its rosy warmth is lit
And the cold grey Bush is a-throb with it.
Then suddenly swift, as it were a sword
Had flashed from some jealous angel's hand,
And severed the music's silken cord,
Cloaked Silence stoops on the listening land,
With the broken bowl of her peace restored.

XI.

SYDNEY

THE green bush mantles your shoulder,
The blue wave washes your feet;
There be greater cities and older,
But never a city so sweet.
By gardens sloped to the water,
By clean towers built for pride,
You were born for an Empire's daughter,
And bred for an ocean's bride !

By every sun-browned maiden
That laughs on your low sea-beach,
By your tanned Apollos laden
With all that your long waves teach,
By each clasp in your diamond splendour,
By each kiss in your leafy cove,
You were made for the passionate tender
Embrace and avowal of love !

By the banks of your rippling river,
And the camping-grounds in the trees,
You were made for ever and ever
For love and laughter and ease.
For sunlit oars on the water,
For soft hands trailed in the foam,
For a moon on the heeling quarter,
When the white sea-wings come home !

Not a ship that rocks in your fairway,
Not a liner lashed to your quays,
Not a war-gig chained to your stairway
But has brought from the outmost seas
Some heart that will soon grow tender
To your charms of beach and grove,
And go sadly forth from your splendour
As a lover would leave his love !

XII.

THE AUSTRALIAN FLEET

LONG and long has she slumbered, till many a mouth
denied

There was life in the ancient spirit that folded our
fathers' pride,

Till many a lip grew scornful and curled at a
nation's name

That could borrow our island honour and trade upon
England's fame.

Long was her pride in awaking, this Queen of the
Southron Seas,

Slow has she been in making a flag to fling to the
breeze;

But at last, alert and stirring, she has heard what
the sagas sing—

At last the wheels are whirring, the hammer and
anvil ring.

Could the old bold blood run calmly, could the old
quick pulse beat slow
While the long waves leap on the Leeuwin and
winds on the Otway blow?
Hark to the ocean crooning the old, old song made
new :
“ Come to me, Sea King’s children—my warm wide
breast for you ! ”

They have left their fires in the ranges, they have
left their ploughs on the plain,
They have left their colts in the stockyard, to come
to their own again !
To plough with their keels the furrows their fathers
ploughed of yore,
To fasten the sea’s white horses to the yoke of the
oak once more !

What fear for the nameless future? What doubt for
the years unrolled?
If the hands are new to the labour, is the blood not
tried and old?
Shall not the spirit of Nelson, of Grenville, and
Howe and Drake
Look down on these decks of venture and guard
them for England’s sake?

XIII.

BLACK WINGS

SEXTONS of the Overland ! Buriers of the dead,
Where graves are lone and shallow and winding
sheets are red !

Wardens of the wagon track, watchers by the creek,
Loiterers in the lignum where the blacksoil traps
the weak !

Feasters at the wayside, guests at the lagoon,
Gloating over dead sheep rotting in the noon !
Robbers on the red roads, highwaymen of Drought,
Settlers of the issue that the dawn has left in doubt !

Was there ever team-horse from the chains let go,
Was there ever lean steer lightened of the bow,
But your hungry vanguard drifting from the sky
Croaked beside his shoulder, glad to watch him die ?

Ever tramped our cattle knee-deep in the grass,
But you soared above them praying Death to pass ?

Ever went our sheep-mobs starvedly and slow,
But you marked their weaklings stumbling to and
fro?

Ever trod a bushman, tramp, or pioneer,
O'er the plains of Famine, through the scrubs of
Fear,
But darker than his danger, closer than his dread,
Shadows on his pathway, flapped ye overhead?

Call to mind the stock routes north and west and
east!—
Every heap of white bones fashioned you a feast!
Call to mind the sandhills!—every wrinkled hide
Made your perch at banquet the day a dumb beast
died!

Surely, at God's muster, when our mobs again
Trample through the star-grass up the purple plain,
When from creek and sandhill crowd our western
dead,
He shall suffer only white wings overhead!

XIV.

THE TEAM BULLOCK

THE sunrays scorched like furnace fires;
The sagging wool-bales dipped and swung;
The sand poured off the four-inch tyres;
The dust upon the float-rails clung.
With lowered head and lolling tongue
The lead-ox leaned against the bow,
With yoke that creaked and chain that rung
To every hoof that lifted slow.

Grim Drought had bound the Western land.
The swamps were dry. The creek was low.
The team that dragged across the sand
Laid wasted necks against the bow;
And as they staggered to and fro,
Mere skeletons of bone and hide,
The ribs that you might count a-row
Made red the chain on either side.

Three flaring dawns had seen them yoked,
Three scorching noons had watched them pass,
With slaver on their lips—half-choked—
Since they had drunk or tasted grass.
The sun bit like a burning-glass.
The near-side leader tripped and fell.
“ They’re done ! ” said Bunt. “ The thing’s a
farce;
An’ drivin’ steers is worse than hell ! ”

He threw his team whip on the sand,
And, turning to the blood-red West,
He called on God with lifted hand
To witness he had done his best;
Then cursed the sandhills, base and crest,
The stranded wagon and the wool,
And raving like a man possessed
Thrice cursed himself for Fortune’s fool.

So, blasphemous, he sought the spot
Where lay the leader; loosed his bow,
And muttered “ He’s the best I’ve got
And, blast him, he’s the first to go ! ”
He kicked its ribs with steel-shod toe,
Then freed its mate and swung the rest,
A staggering line with heads bent low,
Along the highway of the West.

Their hope was dead; their strength was spent;
The leader lost who held them straight.
Dispirited and dull they went
Beneath the pitiless yokes of Fate.
No whip could mend their lifeless gait,
No curse could steer them out or in;
Death on the sandhill seemed to wait,
To claim those victims gaunt and thin.

Old Warrior watched the dust go by,
And heard the bellowing and the blows,
The drone of wheels in distance die,
The prescient clamour of the crows.
Then with an effort he up-rose,
And reeling like a beast in dream,
With drooping loins and dragging toes
Went stumbling on behind the team.

The weary bullocks heard his tread
And stopped beside the slackened chain,
While Warrior gauntly stalked ahead
And backed into his place again.
Touched by a faith beyond his ken,
Bunt murmured with the reverent fear
That comes at times to brutish men,
"My God! But that's the gamest steer!"

He let the threatening whip-thong fall
 Along the sand, a fangless snake;
Though each ignored the starting-call,
 He could not flog—for Warrior's sake.
 With heart it seemed must burst or break
He threw himself on suppliant knees—
 “ My God, upon me pity take,
For I have taken none on these ! ”

XV.

COO-EE !

FOAM that feeds the Leeuwin,
 Rollers in the Bight,
 Cliff and sand of Coogee,
 South Head's lifting light !
 Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
 Hear us call to-night,
 Coo-oo-oo-ee !

Ferry boats to Manly
 Funnel-deep in spray,
 Homes above the Harbour,
 Lights in Double Bay !
 Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
 Friends of far away,
 Coo-oo-oo-ee !

Shady road to Glenwood,
 Laughing Leura Fall,
 Blue Katoomba Valley,
 Grey Kanimbla wall !

Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
Hear your lovers call,
Coo-oo-oo-ee !

Stars above the gum trees,
Camp fires in the bend,
Hoofs upon the sandhills,
And every hoof a friend !
Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
All our love we send,
Coo-oo-oo-ee !

Blue-eyed maiden waiting
By your slip-rail bar,
Brown-faced comrade riding
West by sun and star !
Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
Hear us from afar,
Coo-oo-oo-ee !

Wide the seas between us,
Long the leagues that lie;
If no voice can voyage them
And no voice reply,
Coo-ee ! Coo-oo-ee !
Heart to heart can cry :
Coo-oo-oo-ee !

XVI.

KELPIE LAND

THE dust is blowing in Kelpie Land—
The dust that follows five thousand head
Over the black soil, over the sand,
Over the ridges red.

My heart is back on the bluegrass plains;
My head is bowed in the blinding sun;
Memory rides at my bridle reins
Out where the kelpies* run.

The trail is long and the dams are dry;
The burrs are clinging to raw, red feet;
Under the imminent brazen sky
Hovers a haze of heat.

* Kelpies—Australian sheep dogs.

The sheep are running a mile a-head,
And there, whenever the leaders string,
Laggards loiter, or wing-sheep spread,
Every kelpie's a king.

The cities of earth their food would lack,
The marts of the world for wool would wait,
But that the kelpies open the track
Down to the western gate.

And courage as deep, endeavour as grand
As ever the soul of a hero stirred—
Faith! you may find them in Kelpie Land,
Waked at a careless word!

XVII.

COMRADES

Do the shearers still go riding up the Warrego to
work,

Where the Thurulgoona woolshed flashes silver in
the sun?

Are the bullock-teams still bending through the
coolibahs to Bourke?

Is there racing at Enngonia? Is Belalie still a run?

Do the Diamantina cattle still come down by
Barringun?

Is the black soil just as sticky? Is the mulga just
as dense?

Are the boys still rounding cattle on the red Mul-
kitty plains?

Are there still some brumbies running on the
Maranoa fence?

Still some horsemen always ready with more gal-
lantry than brains

To race them through the thickest scrub with loose
and flapping reins?

Does the flood-wrack still go rocking round the
barren box-tree bends?
Do scorching winds still steal the grass that means
dear life to you?
Do you still receive the message that a ravished
Border sends
Of "Water done all down the road, and starved
stock coming through" ?
Does Drought still ride by Hungerford and Death
by the Paroo?

Heigh-ho ! But those were battle days, and hungry
days, and hard;
With carcases and bones picked bare at every turning
met,
Lean steers upon the cattle-camps, lean horses in the
yard,
And weariness and bitterness, and toil and dust and
sweat !
Good luck to you, brave comrades, who are battling
with them yet !

XVIII.

THE BUSH

I HEAR you slighted often and maligned,
 Mis-read, misquoted by the careless throng,
 And made the home of horror and despair.

* * * *

I know your days of sorrow; one by one
 Have I not gathered them into my breast
 And held them weeping? But I also know
 Your days of royal gladness, when the sun
 Leaps like a shining herald from the sky
 To call to love and laughter, and your nights
 Made mellow with the shrill cicada's hum
 And hung with whiter and with nearer stars
 Than any of God's nights; these things I know,
 And here beyond the dim dividing seas
 I stand and pledge your beauty; and I ask
 For you a future full of wider peace
 And homesteads harbouring a nation's strength,
 Oh! great warm-armed large-hearted Mother o'
 Men!

PART II.
OTHER VERSES



XIX.

A SUMMER EVENING

DUSK o' the night comes down like wings;
Silent are birds that the day found blithe,
The soft low breeze of evening brings
The far-off chime of a hone on scythe.

The nestling swallows beneath the eaves
Chuckle and bubble, "Good-night, good-night;"
The midges dance on the dark elm-leaves,
And the blade o' the moon gleams bright.

Here is a beetle goes late to bed,
Yonder a moth that the star has called,
A wandering rook by the mirk misled,
And a gull by the gloaming thrall'd.

Dusk o' the night comes down like wings;
There is no sound heard but the beetle's drone
And the hum of a million tiny things
That are dear to the dusk alone.

XX.

IN THE WOODS

THE North winds blow with a promise of snow
And grey is the Autumn sky,
But merry and warm through the woods we go,
Neddy and Babs and I.

Babs is wrapped in her scarlet shawl
And snug in her basket chair,
And Daddies of course don't matter at all,
And Neddy's all right in his hair.

Neddy that walks with the stately stride
Of a race that has carried kings,
Taking the Babs for a "booful ride"
That she wouldn't exchange for wings!

We follow the path through the copses brown
Where the shadows hide like thieves,
And the sound we hear like a silken gown
Is Neddy's hoofs in the leaves.

The bracken is bronze and white and gold,
The mosses are wet and green,
The drops that the bending fern-fronds hold
Are the pearliest ever seen.

Fluttering down comes a red, red leaf;
Perhaps from the big beech-tree
A fairy is dropping her handkerchief
To Neddy and Babs and me !

And now we stop while the dead leaves stir
And a step so light goes by
That it might be a pheasant under the fir
Or a raindrop out of the sky !

And now we stand while a red-brown head
Plays hide-and-seek with three—
A squirrel trying to trick old Ned
And baffle my Babs and me !

But the sun is gone, and the shadows creep,
And the gold lights flicker and flee;
And Daddies must work and Neddies sleep
And Babses take their tea.

So we wave one arm to the darkening firs,
And one to the sunset sky,
And home we go—my hand in hers—
Neddy, and Babs, and I.

XXI.

THE MICHAELMAS MOON

O'ER the withered autumn grass,
O'er the trodden stubble gold,
Rides the moon of Michaelmas
Mailed in memories of old.

* * * *

Moon that bade the reivers ride,
Touched the helms and tipped the spears,
Paved a pathway white and wide
For the hoofs of English steers !

Moon that called our chiefs across
To the vengeance of the sword,
Held them straight on Carter moss,
Lit them through the Teviot ford !

Moon that fostered fierce desire,
Moon that wove success a crown,
When the farmyards flamed in fire
And the studded doors went down !

* * * *


Safe the Southron stores his grain,
Safe in stall his steers may stand,
While a martial moon in vain
Beckons to the Borderland !

XXII.

THE MUSHROOM GATHERERS

ERE Fashion has waked to adorning,
Ere Labor goes forth to her toil,
We are free of the Autumn morning
To gather our cream-white spoil;
And from out of her curtain shadow
The Dawn steps, rosy and red,
To dance through the dew-wet meadow
Where the tents of the elves are spread !

Oh ! the search and the sudden wonder,
The cry and the eager run,
The circle of snow-white plunder
Where yesterday grew not one !
Oh ! the hush of the morning holy
On meadow and marsh and hill,
And the basket that fills so slowly,
And the basket that will not fill !



If you walk in the wet grass wary,
If you move with a stealthy tread,
You may chance on a laggard fairy
That has lain too long a-bed;
But a fold of your grey gown shaken,
A tap of your tiny shoe,
And the white tent stands forsaken
To roof a regret for you!

Yet, however our fortune varies,
However our quest may prove,
We have found the gold-heart fairies
That sleep in the tents of Love;
We have trodden the fields of pleasure,
We have drunk of the dawn-wine sweet
And have gathered enough of treasure
If only our fingers meet!

XXIII.

THE ADMIRAL

Low in his cushions, with wide blue eyes,
Our future English Admiral lies.

With loving thought has his life been planned;
He shall take his share of the sea's command.

He shall wear gold lace on his sleeve and breast
If God shall will it.—But God knows best.

In our hope and love we like to dream
Of his flag above and his fleet a-beam.

We like to think of that face aglow
With the kiss of the wind that the sailors know.

We like to fancy those baby hands
A strong man's clenched as he shouts commands.

And to dream of those wide blue eyes a-shine
As his ships come up in a long grey line.

And to picture the pride that will flush his cheek
When the terrible guns of his squadron speak.

And we love to think he will mould and make
Seamen and gunners for England's sake.

Which shall it be, when his hour draws nigh,
That his guns must break and his flags out-fly?

Germany, Italy, France, or Spain?
Russia? Japan? Or the Dutch again?

Dear little Admiral, low he lies
Searching the years with his wide blue eyes.

Is he keeping a wondering watch and ward
Over the hilt of that far-off sword?

Ah! The tides go East and the tides go West,
And life is an ocean. And God knows best!

XXIV.

THE BORDER HARP

LILTING ballads there are that cling
Like busy bees on the purple ling;
Every hill has a harper old
Breaking a song from a harp of gold.
What shall the singer of new songs sing?

Every hoof on the hillside set,
All the pikes that have crossed and met
Back in the reckless raiding time,
The bards have taken and twined in rhyme
And—they ring on the moorland yet.

Every maid that was fair or frail
From Lammermuir to Liddesdale,
Every man that was bold to ride
On the Eastern march or the Solway side,
Lives on for the lyre in silk and mail.

Never a peel-tower, grey o' the wall,
But has wakened again at the rhymer's call,
 Till the crumbling stairways ring and reel
 To the clank of the rider's armoured heel
As he climbs to the bower and hall.

Never an abbey, roofless and bare,
But a singer has sung it in music rare,
 Calling the monks from their cloister cells,
 Bidding the long-dumb vesper bells
Tremble again on the evening air.

Ballad and story rise and ring,
Glamour is out on enchanted wing;
 Here where a thousand harpers old
 Tighten the strings of their harps of gold
What shall the singer of new songs sing?

XXV.

SMAILHOLM TOWER

HERE by the peel-tower old and grey
In the sunlit mornings a lame boy lay,
Speeding his thought o'er ridge and tree
To the magic peaks of the Eildons three;
Hearing the raider's battle-cry
In the call of a whaup that wandered by;
Filling his heart with patriot pride
From the far-flung fields of the Borderside.

The birds flew high; and the lad was lame;
Yet his step was sure in the fields of Fame;
And the lagging foot has changed to wings
That have beckoned nations and gladdened kings;
And the lilt he learned from the larks above
Has been woven in songs of war and love,
And twined into stories sweet and grand
To the lasting pride of the Borderland.

From Sandy Knowe as the winds blow down
Over Bemersyde into Melrose Town,
Laden with love they will turn aside
To the silent tomb by the silver tide,
With a borrowed note from the years of old
Of wild birds crying above the wold,
And the scent of thorn and moorland flower
When a boy lay dreaming by Smailholm Tower.

We have built him statues in street and square,
We have carved him a temple rich and rare,
But the grandest stone to his memory still
Is the grey-walled tower on the windy hill;
For there, long since, in a golden morn
Was the glamour shaped and the glory born
That marked a path for the Master's pen
And drew the chains on a world of men.

XXVI.

A LITTLE BIT OF GARDEN

WE need no crown or sceptre,
For, now that it is Spring,
Just a little bit of garden—
And every man's a king !

A little breadth of border,
A little patch of grass,
Above it all the April sky
Where soft the south winds pass.

A spade and rake for comrades,
The smell of rain-wet mould—
And every time we turn a clod
We turn a mint of gold !

A little bit of garden,
With daffodils a-swing,
And tulip-flowers whose crimson flags
Are only flown for Spring.

Shy blossoming primroses,
Forget-me-nots of blue,
And here a blade and there a blade
Of green things peeping through.

Who seeks for crown or sceptre
When every man's a king
Whose patch of cottage garden
Has felt the feet of Spring?

XXVII.

A FAREWELL

FLOWERS in my fading garden,
I have come to bid you good-bye
Before you have gone through the windy gates
To the land where the dead leaves lie !

Roses, soft children of summer,
I would not ask you to stay,
For the mist is low on the valley
And the last late swallow's away !

Hollyhocks, tall and kingly;
Asters, purple and sweet;
Harpalium, touching my shoulder;
Lobelia, low at my feet.

You have jewelled my path with beauty,
You have brought me a smile to keep;
Go, and the sun go with you
To gladden your dreamless sleep !

Marigolds, marred in blooming;
Lupins that languid lie;
Dahlias drooping beneath the frost;
Good-bye, good-bye, and good-bye !

Not a wind shall blow in December
Above the green earth's grave
But shall bid my heart remember
The gifts that my garden gave !

XXVIII.

THERE'S A CLEAN WIND BLOWING

THERE'S a clean wind blowing
Over hill-flower and peat,
Where the bell-heather's growing,
And the brown burn flowing,
And the ghost-shadows going
Down the glen on stealthy feet.
There's a clean wind blowing,
And the breath of it is sweet.

There's a clean wind blowing,
And the world holds but three :
The purple peak against the sky,
The master wind, and me.
The moor birds are tossing
Like ships upon the sea;
There's a clean wind blowing
Free.

There's a clean wind blowing,
Untainted of the town,
A fair-hitting foeman
With his glove flung down.
Will ye take his lordly challenge
And the gauntlet that he throws,
And come forth among the heather
Where the clean wind blows !

XXIX.

SHEEP COUNTRY

FLAME of the heather dying,
Fires of the bracken lit,
Winds of October sighing
Over the gold of it.

Clouds on the hill-top trailing,
Shadows caught in the glen;
Whaups to the moorland wailing
Sorrows unguessed of men.

Grey moor gathered beside us,
Blue moor meeting the sky;
High peaks set to guide us,
Low hills letting us by.

Rough-topped grey walls creeping
Out to the grey sky-line;
Woods, and within them sleeping
Tasselled and storm-tossed pine.

Tracks in the heath around us
Only the sheep have trod;
Nothing to bind or bound us
Save the wide skies of God!

XXX.

BABY'S TRUMPET

WHEN Baby blows her trumpet
The elves of mischief ride,
Her eyes are lit with laughter,
Her cheeks are puffed with pride.
What gift of cradle-fairies
Has taught our queen to know
God's angel guards are waiting
To hear her trumpet blow?

When Baby blows her trumpet
The tramp of feet one hears,
One sees her loyal legions
With sunlit lifted spears;
Their golden breastplates quiver,
Their golden helmets shine,
When Baby blows her trumpet
And wheels her troops in line.

When Baby blows her trumpet
The world grows young again,
The silent aisles of Fancy
Grow loud with marching men.
Before her deathless army
The earth is all her own,
No rival ranks are marshalled,
No answering bugles blown.

When Baby blows her trumpet
The woods of Wonder wake,
The hills of Hope are peopled
With swords for Some One's sake.
From every windy tree-top,
From every peak above,
In splendour fly unfolded
The crimson flags of Love.

When Baby blows her trumpet
The kingdoms cease from sound;
To rule so rich an army
No empress yet was crowned.
Earth's towers shall yield their treasure,
Earth's gates fall back unbarred,
When Baby with her trumpet
Calls up her golden guard.

XXXI.

A LULLABY

LADY Moon, O Lady Moon,
Here's a little sleepy girlie that must go to slumber
soon !
Won't you glide across the window on your shining
silver wings,
Won't you spare 'twixt noon and noon
Just one tiny tender minute to this cot with baby
in it,
Though I know you're O so busy with a hundred
million things !

Lady Moon, O Lady Moon,
Let her see the polished buckles on your gleaming
silver shoon !
Let her touch your diamond rings and the
star-dust on your wings;
And should you bend above her—ah ! but that would
be a boon !—
And kiss her little rosy lips, how kind, O Lady
Moon !

Lady Moon, O Lady Moon,
Tell her just one fairy-story that you've gathered as
you go
From the pinewoods or the snow,
From the gaily lighted cities or the stars above them
strewn !
There's a sleepy little girlie that would like
so much to know
Just one little fairy-story, Lady Moon !

Lady Moon, O Lady Moon,
It is late; and you're so busy with so many trysts to
keep,
And our little wide-eyed babba—it is time she went
to sleep !
Kiss those cheeks that mock December
With their roses picked in June;
Though she's sleepy she'll remember,
She'll remember, Lady Moon !

XXXII.

THE FARM

It is all in my heart; the little farm, the steep stacks,
and the furrows

Running from headland to headland straight and
level and true;

The upland sloping, the yellow broom, the whins,
and the rabbit burrows,

And higher the green of the bracken, and the
hill sheep rustling through.

It is all in my heart; the grey stone, the blue slates
of the shedding,

The pigeons cooing together, the starlings up on
the wall,

The trough where the Clydesdales drink, the bul-
locks' golden bedding,

The polished red-wood mangers—in my heart I
hold it all.

The trampled bank in the meadow where the young
March lambs run races,
The sandy beach at the burn where the cows
stand long in June,
The willow shade at the pond and the cool of the
woodland places,
The milking-call of evening and the honed
scythe's morning tune.

It is all in my heart. The roses that swing from the
farmhouse wall,
The hollyhocks in the garden, standing tall and
apart;
Abroad, on the sea, in the cities, ten thousand miles
from it all,
Faithful and unforgetting, I have held it close in
my heart !

XXXIII.

THE PLOUGH

FROM Egypt behind my oxen with their stately step
and slow
Northward and East and West I went to the desert
sand and the snow;
Down through the centuries one by one, turning the
clod to the shower,
Till there's never a land beneath the sun but has
blossomed behind my power.

I slid through the sodden ricefields with my grunting
hump-backed steers,
I turned the turf of the Tiber plain in Rome's Im-
perial years;
I was left in the half-drawn furrow when Cincin-
natus came
Giving his farm for the Forum's stir to save his
nation's name.

Over the seas to the North I went; white cliffs and
a seaboard blue;
And my path was glad in the English grass as my
stout red Devons drew;
My path was glad in the English grass, for behind
me rippled and curled
The corn that was life to the sailor men that sailed
the ships of the world.

And later I went to the North again, and day by
day drew down
A little more of the purple hills to join to my king-
dom brown;
And the whaups wheeled out to the moorland, but
the grey gulls stayed with me
Where the Clydesdales drummed a marching song
with their feathered feet on the lea.

Then the new lands called me Westward; I found on
the prairies wide
A toil to my stoutest daring and a foe to test my
pride;
But I stooped my strength to the stiff black loam,
and I found my labour sweet
As I loosened the soil that was trampled firm by a
million buffaloes' feet.

Then further away to the Northward; outward and
outward still
(But idle I crossed the Rockies, for there no plough
may till !)
Till I won to the plains unending, and there on the
edge of the snow
I ribbed them the fenceless wheatfields, and taught
them to reap and sow.

The sun of the Southland called me; I turned her
the rich brown lines
Where her Parramatta peach-trees grow and her
green Mildura vines;
I drove her cattle before me, her dust, and her
dying sheep,
I painted her rich plains golden and taught her to
sow and reap.

From Egypt behind my oxen with stately step and
slow
I have carried your weightiest burden, ye toilers
that reap and sow !
I am the Ruler, the King, and I hold the world in
fee;
Sword upon sword may ring, but the triumph shall
rest with me !

XXXIV.

ON THE DEDICATION OF THE
FLODDEN MEMORIAL

September 27th, 1910.

“ TO THE BRAVE OF BOTH NATIONS.”

TO-DAY, some flower of pride and grief,
A poor belated gift, we bring
To twine with autumn's reddening leaf
And deck this shrine, remembering.

Forgotten brave ! Your spear blades rust,
Your glory like September's gold
Is scattered far in dead leaves' dust —
To feed the wind upon the wold !

Their jealous, tireless watch, O brave,
Only the faithful war-gods keep,
Still loyal to your nameless grave,
Still guardian of your dreamless sleep !

To-day, upon this fateful crest,
We pledge our word in constant stone
To hold in memory Scotland's best,
To keep our faith with England's own.

That those twin lands, once foes, may now,
Become more kind in sister growth,
Beside this granite altar bow
In homage to the brave of both.

Ah ! Queen of Teviot ! You who sent
Your heroes to this hill of yore
At Scotland's call; will you, content,
Let others wreath your sons of war ?

O, forest town ! with banners gay,
You sped your seventy down the glen !
Will you not send their sons to-day
To claim this gift for Ettrick men ?

And you, where Tweed and Teviot twine !
And you, fair daughter of the Jed !
Your warriors stood in Scotland's line;
Have ye no honour for the Dead ?

Gather, ye Borders!—Gather, too,
English and Scots from glen and coombe!
Ye have your duty still to do:
One wreath to lay on One Land's tomb!

Thus by your presence shall ye prove
The gift your faith can best bestow:
A promise to this land we love,
To rally when her bugles blow!

And when the latest word is said,
With slow and silent steps depart!
Leave lonely Flodden to her dead,
And leave her dead to One Land's heart!

XXXV.

THE COMFORT OF THE HILLS

HEART ! If you've a sorrow,
Take it to the hills !
Lay it where the sunshine
Cups of colour spills !
Hide it in the shadow
Of the folding fern;
Bathe it in the coolness
Of the brown hill burn;
Give it to the west wind,
Blowing where it will;
Heart ! If you've a sorrow,
Take it to the hills !

Heart ! If you've a sorrow,
Take it to the hills,
Where Pity crowns the silence
And Love the loneliness fills !

Bury it in bracken,
 Waving green and high,
O'er it let the heather's
 Peaceful purple lie !
Trust it to the healing
 Heaven itself distils;
Heart ! If you've a sorrow,
 Take it to the hills !

XXXVI.

THE ROMAN WALL

THE grey moor dips to the mist-blue valley;
The valley stoops to the silver Tyne;
And here, on the edge of earth and sky,
Where the blackcock feeds and the curlews cry,
Is the long Wall's lonely line.

Do the legions come in the night, I wonder,
Trying to gather with ghostly hands
The stones that Time with his towering breakers
Has flung afar on these moorland acres
Like sea-wrack flung on the Solway sands?

Do the moonbeams glint on the sheen of the eagles?
Do the burnished helms in the starlight glow?
Is there no sound heard of the horses' feet
And the waggon-tyres on the wheel-worn street
When the ghostly trumpets blow?

Do they stand by the Wall, the cohort captains,
And hearken, leaning on idle spears,
To the step of the grim, resistless Foeman
Who broke the triumph of Rome and Roman
Under the heel of his trampling years?

Conquering Time!—yet he, too, took pity
On glory thrust from its golden throne,
And a flower on the old Wall planted deep—
A wreath on the grave where the warriors sleep
And the mindful war-gods watch their own.

See; I take for remembrance, red with ruin,
From the Wall where the clashing vanguards met,
This bloom that the crumbling stones have cherished,
This after-flower of an Empire perished,
To bind in my garland of rare regret!

XXXVII.

THE SHADOW DANCERS

WHEN the swallow's dipping low and the cloud's
 above the wheat
 You can see the Shadow Dancers as they pass on
 flying feet;
 The swallow is no mate for them so swift their
 sandals glance,
 The South Wind or the West Wind is their partner
 in the dance.

They tread the fields as silently as bats on dewy
 wings,
 They clash no merry cymbals and they clink no
 ankle-rings;
 The wild rose sees the coming of the twilight that
 they cast
 And lifts her blushing face to them—and Lo! the
 dance is past!

Not a watcher in the barley, not a listener in the
wheat,

Sees a shape or hears a whisper of those twinkling
shadow feet;

If they leave a fairy message will the corn remem-
ber it,

Or the poppies, or the charlock, when the evening
stars are lit ?

XXXVIII.

THE CAMP FOLLOWERS

ALWAYS across the winter snows,
With step that keeps abreast the years,
A merry, mirthful army goes
With gladness on its glistening spears.

Its purple cloaks are lined with gold;
Red holly in its helmets set
Flings out warm fire to wood and wold,
Like some gem-circled coronet.

To revelry its flags are flown;
Its cheering shakes the frosty air;
The challenge on its trumpets blown
Has burst the distant walls of Care.

No captain of this boisterous band,
No soldier in this laughing line,
But holds the torch of Joy in hand
And treads the road to warmth and wine.

Yet aye behind this happy host,
Beyond the ring its torchlight keeps,
Less man by man than ghost by ghost,
Another shadowy army creeps.

Barefooted, hungry, pale with fear,
In grim accompaniment it stirs
The dead leaves of the dying year—
These are our mirth's camp followers.

XXXIX.

RICHES

I MAY neither sport nor feast;
Wealth is not for me to make;
But the sun is mine, at least,
And my blue hills none can take.
If I own no gardens fair
I can watch the wild rose twine,
Wood and wold are mine to share
And the hills, the hills are mine.

Though my purse can never buy
Place to hear the diva's song,
There's a lark against the sky,
And to me the birds belong.
Though I own no acres broad,
Though I hold no farms in fee,
Yonder glorious hills of God
Hold their purple arms to me.

If my cellar lacks of wine,
 Blowing splendid from the sea
Are not all the hill-winds mine
 Brimming golden cups for me?
If my shelves of books are bare,
 Have I not the skies to read,
And the wild flowers that declare
 What is aye the cleaner creed?

Let the wealthy hoard their gold,
 Let the famous guard their wreath;
All I ask to keep and hold
 Is my path across the heath;
None my freeway to withstand,
 None my faith and me to part,
Just the winds to hold my hand
 And the hills to keep my heart!

XL.

THE GREY NURSE

AT the feet of this oldest of nurses,
Whom the wind has made grey with his strife,
Happy youth in its wonder rehearses
The play and the labour of life;
And there for our children the ocean,
Robed round with the charm of her spells,
Turns over with tireless devotion
Her treasure of seaweed and shells.

She fills their rock-gardens with blossom,
She smoothes the clean sand for their feet,
And tells them, clasped close to her bosom,
Old tales that are tender and sweet;
Old stories, old sagas and verses,
Old ballads of beautiful tears,
Whose words are the tender grey nurse's,
Whose tune is the sob of the years.

We forgive her her squadrons of thunder,
Her gauntleted hand on the gate,
Her long years of rapine and plunder,
Her ages of anger and hate,
As we watch her chase, romping and eager,
The bare feet all browned by the sun,
Over castles her love will beleaguer
And trenches her joy will o'er-run.

We have watched her, a war-queen, in splendour,
Come riding in harness of spray;
We have seen her soft-mantled and tender
Lean low to our babes in the bay;
And, forgetting her sword-play and slaughter,
When the little white wavelets are curled,
We know the wild Witch of the Water
Is the gentlest grey nurse in the world.

XLI.

THE RAJAH'S PRIDE

HE who ruled for the English King
Summoned the chiefs to his counselling.
Princes and governors met at his call,
East with the West, in the council hall.
Never were ranged in a room before
Such wealth of gems as the Rajahs wore;
The smallest stone in the simplest ring
Was the ransom price of a captured king.

A prince there was of a petty state,
Least of them all where all were great,
Lacking, it seemed, in the pride assigned
By the gracious gods to the lords of Hind.
A ruby chanced from his chain to fall
On the paven floor of the council hall.
Forgetting his Eastern dignity,
The chief with his henchman bent the knee,
And searched for the jewel with nervous dread,
While a smile on the English faces spread.

Beside him, impassive, a Rajah stood,
His rubies of Burmah red like blood,
His emeralds flashing a sea-green fire,
His pearls surpassing a queen's desire;
Yet his rarest jewels less brightly burned
Than the flame in his eyes when, fierce, he turned
And noted the deed of the native-born
And the English lips that curled in scorn.
With a sudden movement light as a girl's
He snapped a string of his priceless pearls;
Like hail they scattered; his servants came
Swift to his aid, but his eyes flashed flame—
“*No!*” The word fell like a blade on the air.
“*What is found in the dust is the sweeper's share!*”

XLII.

A MAKER OF EMPIRE

A PATIENT, honest, kindly friend
The packhorse plodded down the years,
Content his humble life to spend
In toil to aid the pioneers.
Before the swagman and his load,
Before the waggon and the train,
He trampled out the dusty road
And trod the dry road in again.

He bore the first prospector's pan,
The first surveyor's tent and gear;
With Sturt and Mitchell led the van
O'er plains of Doubt, through scrubs of Fear.
When foemen swarmed about the track
The danger-circled path he kept,
And bore the blankets on his back
Of watchful men who seldom slept.

In the grey dust of moving herds
He tugged at dawn the golden grass,
While through the mist like phantom birds
He saw the great white bullocks pass.
In the cool creek at noon he splashed,
Or drank at eve from brackish wells;
All day his swinging camp-ware clashed,
All night his bell among the bells.

Before the engine's throb and thrust,
Before the humming of the wires,
This overlander, swathed in dust,
Across the last dim range retires.
Yet those who know shall not forget
That North and Westward, rod by rod,
He saw the conquering camp-fires set
And broke the track an Empire trod.

XLIII.

THE HAPPY PEOPLE

Do you know the Happy People? The really
happy folk,
Who bear no woman's burden, who bend to no
man's yoke?
The happy, laughing people who chase on golden
ways
From starlight unto starlight the splendor of the
days?

Their world is bright with butterflies, their path
with daisies strewn ;
They've a fairy on the rainbow and a witch astride
the moon.
They have jewels in the sunbeams, they have
diamonds in the dew ;
They have love-songs in the south wind that were
never heard by you !

No stream but bears their fancy in a boat of silver
foam,

No fire but holds them in its heart towers as of
ancient Rome.

Their green and gorgeous tents are spread in every
tree that grows,

They dream with every daisy and rejoice with every
rose.

If you'd know the Happy People, you must take
wee dimpled hands

And go down among the daisies or across the shin-
ing sands,

For nowhere is there room for faith and nowhere
time for truth

Save in that darling kingdom where the harpers harp
to Youth.

XLIV.

TO MY BABY GIRL

O, little heart
That beats so close to mine,
I pray for you
That every heart be true
Which through the years shall worship at your shrine;
May none betray,
None kneeling with his roses give you rue;
This only, little heart, I pray,
I pray for you.

XLV.

THE WILD SWAN

JUST when the stars were peeping,
Just as the night went by
With the switch of her dark broom sweeping
The half-lights out of the sky,
With beautiful wings a-quiver
A tired white swan sank down
To the breast of a Border river
In the shade of the reed-beds brown.

Here to the same spot nightly
Hometh the same white bird.
Step through the dewdrops lightly;
Brush through the boughs unheard;
Lift not a hand to scare him !
Breathe not a sound to fret,
Lest the tired white pinions bear him
Further and further yet !

Ere the dew is dry on the daisies,
Ere the eastern sky glows red,
With broad wings fanning the hazes
Our guest of an hour is fled.
“A wild swan came to the river
Last night, and at dawn was gone!”
’Tis the exile’s heart that for ever
Comes home as a wild white swan!

[THE END]

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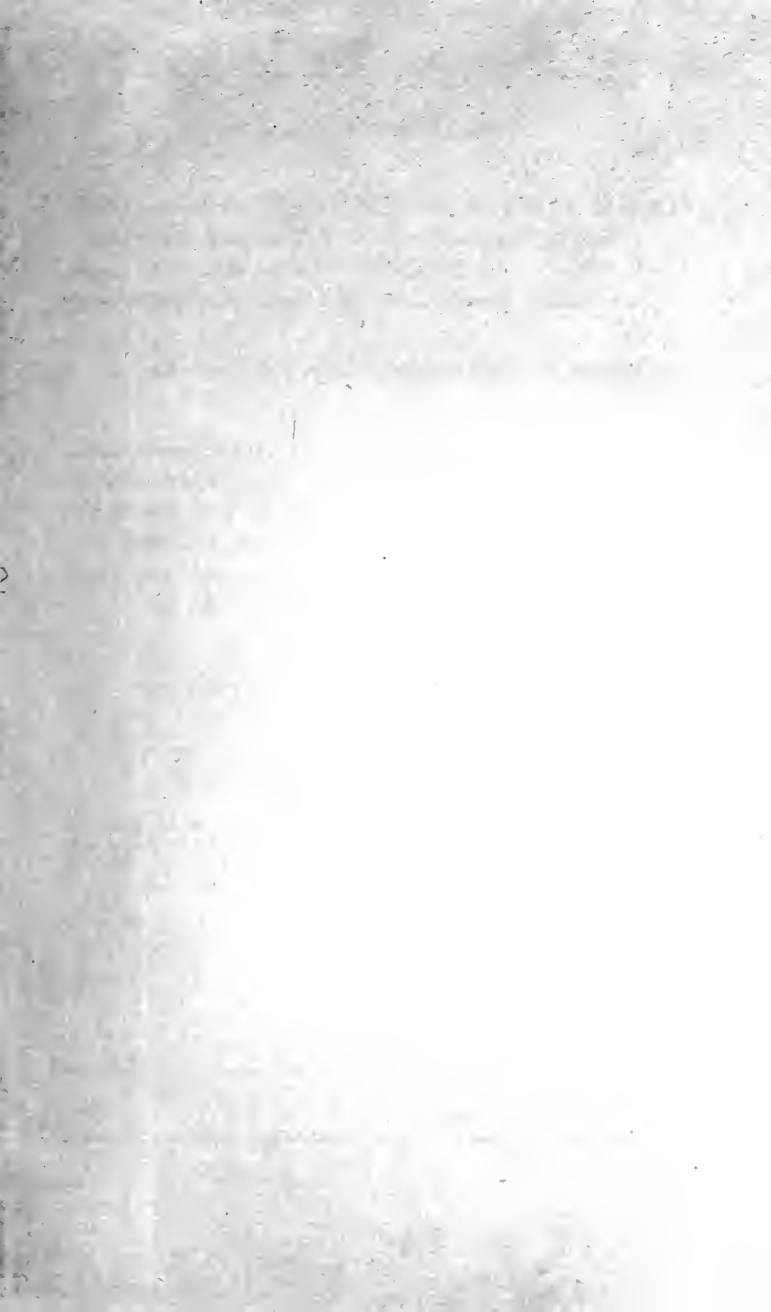
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